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Meat Science Legend Leads Grad From Rookie To The Big Leagues

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Craig Morris always wore his St. Louis Cardinals hat. As a freshman animal science student at Iowa State in 1988, that hat made him feel at home. It also caught the eye of his meat science professor, F.C. Parrish, who would come to do the same.

Morrison (’92 meat science), now the deputy administrator of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Livestock and Seed Program, credits Parrish’s influence for leading him to his dream job—facilitating the domestic and international marketing of the nation’s meat supply.

Like Morris, Parrish was a native of the St. Louis area, and felt an instant kinship. “He was an excellent scientist as a young guy. You don’t find them that work any harder than Craig did. He wanted to succeed,” Parrish says.

Morris worked with a butcher in high school and was working for Carriage House Meats in Ames at the time. “I loved everything about the meat business,” Morris says, “and F.C. loved teaching people about the business. We gravitated toward each other.
Parrish hired Morris as an undergrad research assistant. "After I was exposed to research, I never really left," he says. Once he arrived at Iowa State, Morris spent every weekend and every semester break either working in the ISU Meat Lab or on an internship that Parrish helped him land. He was a member of the meats judging team, and Parrish introduced him to the American Meat Science Association.

"I didn’t have a friend in college that I spent more time with than F.C. It was seamless between work and fun," Morris says.

Well known in the meat science industry, Parrish was on faculty in animal science for more than 35 years teaching introductory and advanced meat science classes. He taught more than 5,000 undergraduate and graduate students during his tenure and was major professor to more than 30 graduate students before retiring as a University Professor in 2001.

He and his wife Fern provided Morris with home-cooked meals and moral support. In return, Morris mowed their lawn when Parrish was recovering from minor surgery. For him the couple became “like second parents.”

After graduation in 1992 Morris continued to work at the Meat Lab. Parrish recommended graduate schools and helped him find the best fit at Texas A&M.

"F.C. wanted me to go out and experience the world. If he would have just once asked me, I would have stayed, but he was kicking me out of the nest. It’s the best thing that could have happened," Morris says.

At the USDA Morris oversees marketing activities for livestock, meat, fish, grain and seed. It’s a big job. He manages budgets and human resources for nearly 500 full-time employees.

He oversees USDA grading and verification programs ranging from Prime Beef on restaurant menus to export verification programs allowing U.S. meats to enter countries all over the world. He handles purchasing specifications for commodities that go into the nation’s school lunch program and food banks. He also oversees country of origin labeling, market news reporting for livestock and grain; check-off programs for beef, pork, lamb, soybean and sorghum; accreditation of organic certification bodies; and the Federal Seed Act ensuring agricultural seeds are accurately labeled for interstate and international commerce.

Morris learned to manage employees from Parrish’s example.

“I used to put a lot on my plate and needed help to prioritize. F.C. would put a ‘one’ next to everything on my list and let me work through it,” Morris quips. “I’ve tried to emulate him as I’ve gotten more responsibility in my career. He surrounded himself with self-starters, independent thinkers and creativity. He trusted his employees. He would impart ownership and push you into the limelight.”

Morris can’t help but wonder what his life might have been like if not for Parrish.

“Just think,” he says, “if I’d have been a Cubs fan, that might have been the end of it.”